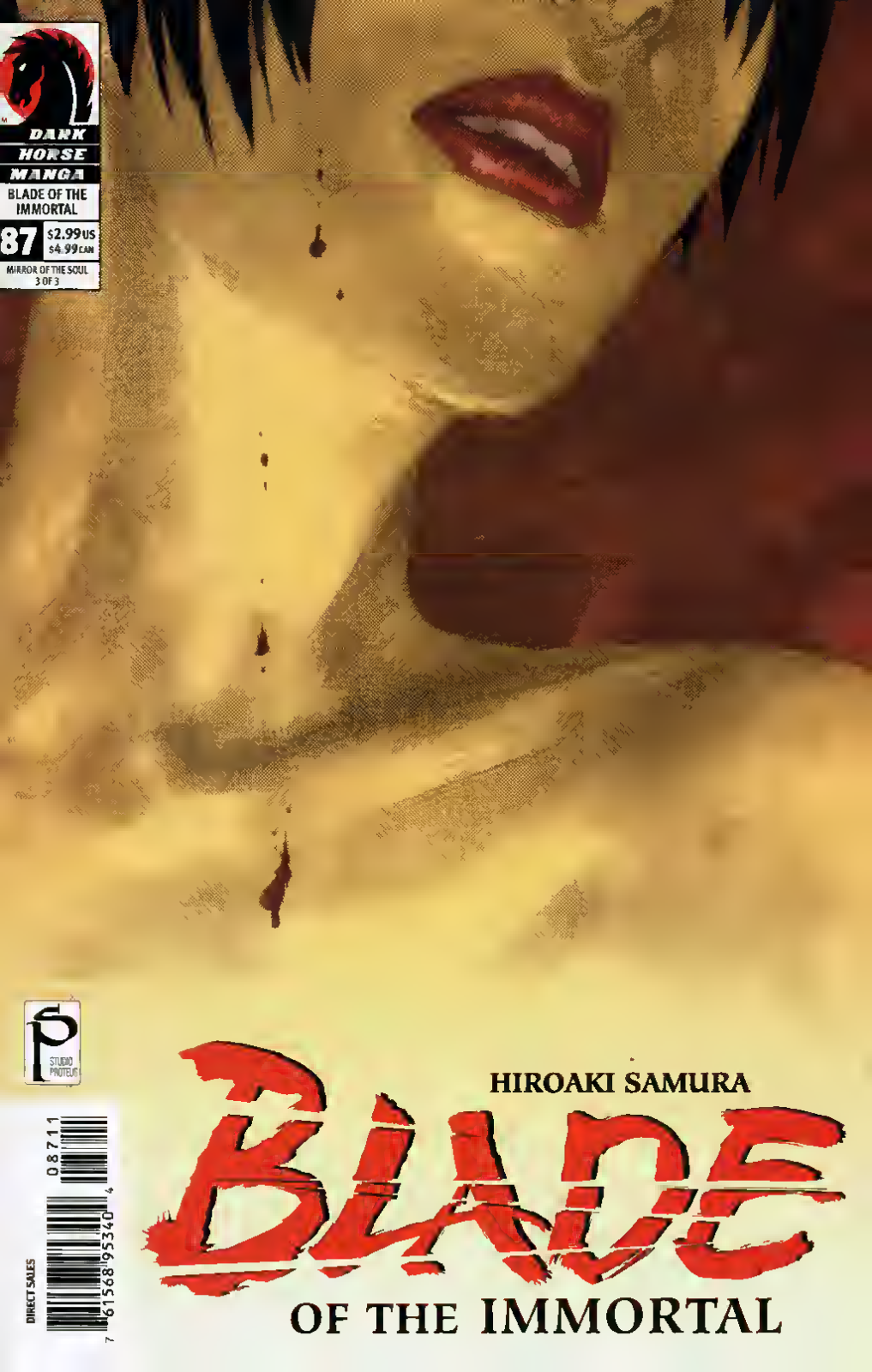
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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

art and story by
HIROAKI SAMURA

translation by
DANA LEWIS and TOREN SMITH

lettering and retouch by
TOMOKO SAITO

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MANJI
Immortal *rōnin*

RIN
Last heir of the Muteniichi-*ryū dojō* destroyed by Ittō-*ryū*

ANOTSU
The leader of the Ittō-*ryū* sword school

MAKIE
Former Ittō-*ryū* swordswoman and geisha

THE STORY SO FAR

Infected by *kessenchu* mystical bloodworms which can heal all wounds and grant their host immortality, Manji's bloodthirst led to the capture and murder of his sister. To atone for the 100 good people who died at his hand under his corrupted lord, Manji vowed to slay 1,000 evil men in exchange for the release of death.

Two years earlier, when her parents were murdered on her fourteenth birthday by Anotsu Kagehisa's Ittō-*ryū* swordsmen, Rin Asano became part of a mad revenge cycle which began when Anotsu's grandfather was thrown out of the Asano clan's Muteniichi-*ryū dōjō* fifty years before. A quest for vengeance was instilled in Anotsu, a similar quest now haunts Rin. Upon learning of Manji, she enlisted his aid to destroy the Ittō-*ryū* and avenge her parents.

After leaving Manji to complete her quest alone, Rin prevails over great hardships and comes into a strange, unsteady alliance with Anotsu in order to survive while on the run in Kaga. Assassins surprise them but are quickly cut down by Anotsu's unique weapon. Discovering that these assassins are his ally's students, Anotsu runs back to Kensui's sword school for an explanation. Unable to deal with the fact that he was forced to betray Anotsu, Kensui commits suicide... as does Hisoka, Anotsu's new wife. Rin and Anotsu are now trying to flee Kaga, with a band of Kensui's students on their trail, stopping only when Anotsu tracks down his heart's true desire, Makie, a much-respected swordswoman who once bested Manji in battle.

designer DEBRA BAILEY editor PHILIP SIMON publisher MIKE RICHARDSON

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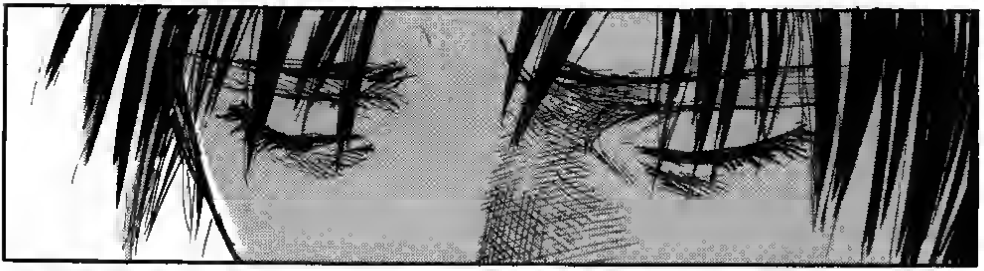
無限の住人

MIRROR OF THE SOUL

– *part three* –

.....
.....
Ahh...

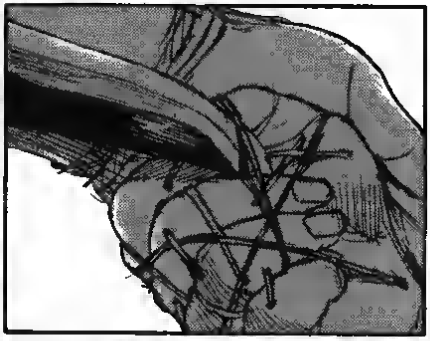


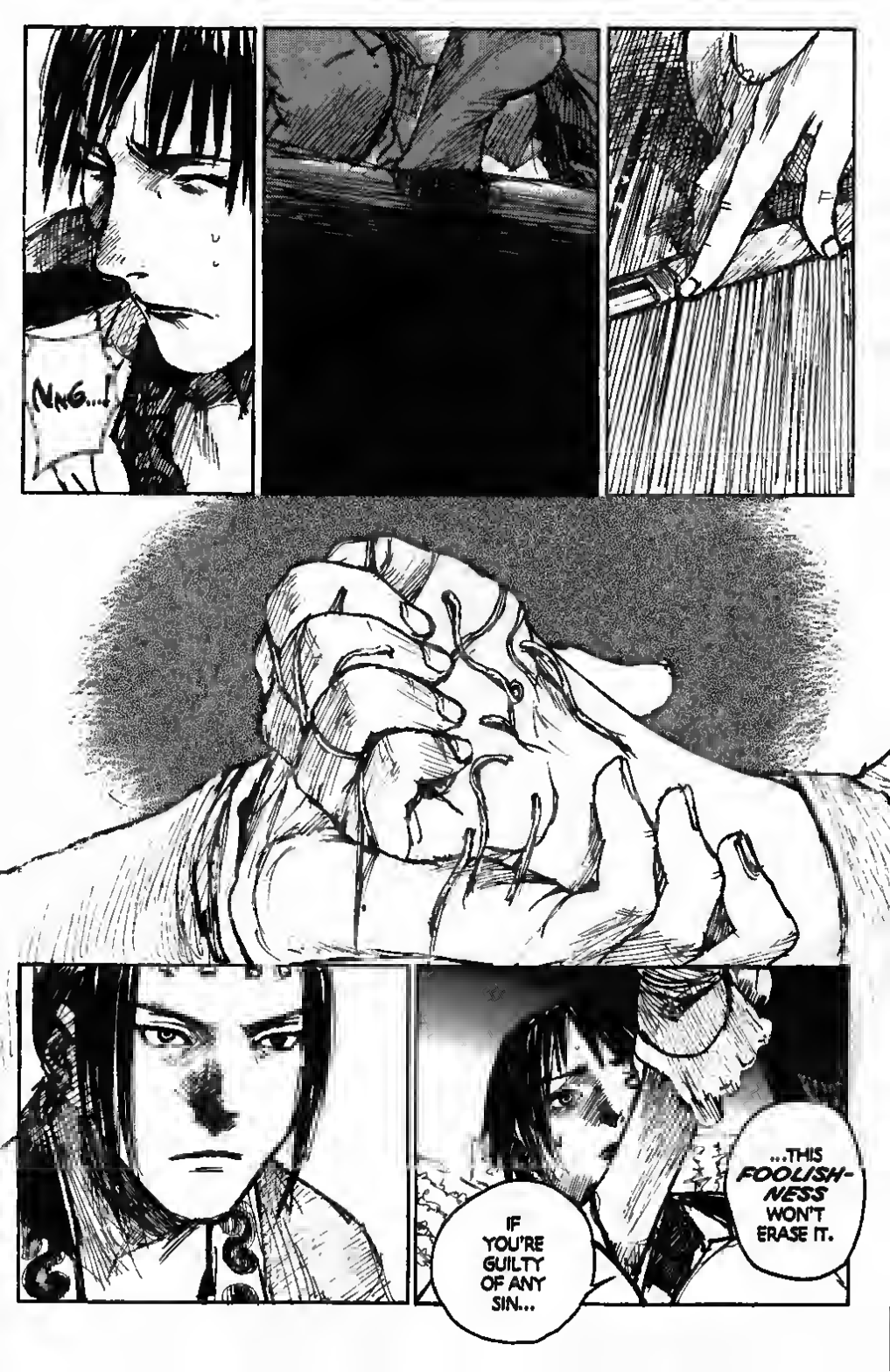
-;sniff-
.....
.....

I SHOULD NEVER HAVE GONE THERE. AND IF I *HAD* TO GO...
...I SHOULD *NEVER* HAVE HESITATED. NOT ONE *MOMENT*.
AT THAT INSTANT...
...THE LAST REASON, THE *ONLY* REASON I COULDN'T PUT DOWN THE SWORD...
...*VANISHED*.

I...I'D PLANNED, AFTER KILLING HIM...
...TO KILL *MYSELF*. THEN AND THERE.
NEVER *DESERVING* THE MISFORTUNE I BROUGHT THEM. THE MISFORTUNE *MY BLADES* BROUGHT THEM...
MY *MOTHER*, MY BROTHER, ALL THOSE OTHER INNOCENT PEOPLE...
...AND MY *HEART* THREW IT ALL AWAY.
AND THE ONE AND ONLY PERSON I *SHOULD* HAVE KILLED...
BUT THOSE *BLADES*...
OH, *GOD*... THIS *HAND*...

SUCH A HOPELESS... FOOL OF A WOMAN. FADING AWAY LIKE THIS... NEVER SAVING ANYONE'S SOUL, PURGING ANYONE'S SINS...
...NEVER ACCOMPLISHING ANYTHING AT ALL. IT'S SO...
SO MISERABLE... SO... TERRIFY-ING.
.....
.....
.....




NNG...!
IF YOU'RE GUILTY OF ANY SIN...
...THIS FOOLISHNESS WON'T ERASE IT.

WE ARE KENSHI! ONLY THE SWORD CAN PAY FOR THE SINS OF THE SWORD!
ACCEPT IT! YOU'VE CROSSED THE LINE... STEPPED INTO THE WHIRLPOOL.
YOU CAN'T TURN YOUR BACK ON THE WORLD, OR PLAY THE CRIPPLE. YOU NO LONGER HAVE THAT RIGHT!
AND SHOULD YOU TRY... INDEED, YOU DO NOT DESERVE TO LIVE!

THIS HAND... NEARLY TEN DAYS SINCE YOU BOUND IT?
THE CORDS WILL HAVE HEALED TO YOUR FLESH.
IF I TEAR THEM OUT, YOUR BODY WILL BE...
...RACKED WITH UNSPEAK-ABLE PAIN.
BUT NO MATTER HOW MUCH YOU CRY OR SCREAM, I WILL NOT STAY MY HAND.
GRIP THESE SHOULDERS, AND ENDURE.

...FOR ALL YOU PLUNGED INTO SORROW.
CONSIDER EACH *WAVE* OF PAIN AS YOUR *PENANCE*...
.....
.....
.....
ARE YOU READY?

NNG...
.....

AAH!
AH...

.....
.....
HNN...
AH!
OH...
OH!
NNGK...
AUGH!

UUU...
NNG...

MY FIRST AND GREATEST MASTER...
I WILL NEVER FORGET THE DAY YOU SHOWED ME...
...FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME...
...THE BEAUTY OF THE STRONG.
...THAT GIFT ONLY YOU CAN WIELD.
I WILL NEVER, NEVER LET IT BE WASTED...

DID YOU GET SOME SWEET POTATOES ...?
YEAH, AND I ATE THEM ALREADY!
I WOULDN'T DREAM OF ASKING EXACTLY WHAT YOU'VE BEEN UP TO, BUT...
...COULDN'T YOU ACT A BIT MORE LIKE A WANTED MAN?!
.....
.....
.....
HERE. YOUR HALF.
WANT IT...?

hahh
hff

DON'T TELL ME... THIS GUY... PLANS TO...
...RUN ALL THE WAY TO EDO?!
TH-THERE'S A HUT...
SHOULD WE...?

Y-YOU NEED... TO ASK?
NO. WE KEEP GOING... FAR AS... T-TAKA-YAMA...
?? HIS VOICE ...?!
.....
.....
.....

WHA...?!
WAIT...!
H-HEY, YOU...!
WHAT'S WRONG ?!
TO BE CONTINUED...!

BONUS GIFTS

付録

Original art for gift wristwatch (September 1996)
Printed on black background with shiny black ink

Original art for gift His 'n Hers matching teacup set (November 1994)
At room temperature, the background figure (Rin in the top drawing, Manji in the bottom) was obscured by black ink, only appearing when hot water was poured into the glass.

Manji

Rin

Original art for gift hand towel (November 2000)

LETTERS

send letters to:

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Blade Peeps,

Wot up? Sorry about the lateness of this letter, but I've been in limbo recently workin' on my own stuff -- which means I've only recently caught up on readin' the past 20 issues or so!!

First off, I wanna give a shout out to Neil Martin who wrote a letter in *Blade* #63 askin' if I was the Simon Davis from *2000 AD* magazine. Sorry, Neil, I'm not ..if you're still readin'? I'm just a fan like you, mate!

Secondly, I noticed a few people sayin' the pace of the book was a little slow! What!?! C'mon guys, Samura-san takes time to develop characters and plot. This is what we, the readers, want! It's not just mindless violence, which is what some would have everyone believe.

Blade of the Immortal is the biggest and baddest thing going! Keep it up, Dark Horse! Lastly, congrats on *Lone Wolf 2100*. It really is somethin' special. The work on these titles is carved outta rock! I hope you like the attached drawin'. It's not from *Blade*, but I think it suits the spirit of the book!

Keep on keepin' it real!
Simon Davis
Birmingham, England

Thanks for the image, Simon. We're running it here because it does indeed invoke the spirit of *Blade*, but we're expecting a *Blade*-inspired drawing from you next time, brother! Double thanks, also, to ALL of our faithful, monthly readers! Send in fan art and pin-ups! I have some cool things lined up for future *Blade of the Immortal* issues, like the bonus pages printed in this one (which were additional pages for the Japanese *Blade* volume 11 collection)!

Not carved like The Rock,
—Philip Simon

ABOUT THE SWASTIKA

The main character in *Blade of the Immortal*, Manji, has taken the "crux gammata" as both his name and his personal symbol. This symbol is also known as the *swastika*, a name derived from the Sanskrit *svastika* (meaning "welfare," from *su* — "well" + *asti* — "he is"). As a symbol of prosperity and good fortune, the swastika was widely used throughout the ancient world (for example, appearing often on Mesopotamian coinage), including North and South America and has been used in Japan as a symbol of Buddhism since ancient times. To be precise, the symbol generally used by Japanese Buddhists is the *sauvastika*, which moves in a counter-clockwise direction, and is called the *manji* in Japanese. The *sauvastika* generally stands for night, and often for magical practices. The *swastika*, whose arms point in a clockwise direction, is generally considered a solar symbol. It was this version (the *hokenkreuz*) that was perverted by the Nazis. It is important that readers understand that the swastika has ancient and honorable origins and it is those that apply to this story, which takes place in the 18th century (ca. 1782-3). *There is no anti-Semitic or pro-Nazi meaning behind the use of the symbol in this story. Those meanings did not exist until after 1910.*

ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

The Artwork: The author of *Blade of the Immortal* requested that we make an effort to avoid mirror-imaging his artwork. Normally, all of our manga are first copied in a mirror-image in order to facilitate the left-to-right reading of the pages. However, Mr. Samura decided that he would rather see his pages reversed via the technique of cutting up the panels and repasting them in reverse order. While we feel that this often leads to problems in panel-to-panel continuity, we place primary importance on the wishes of the creator. Therefore, most of *Blade of the Immortal* has been produced using the "cut and paste" technique. There are, of course, some sequences where it was impossible to do this, and mirror-imaged panels or pages were used instead.

The Sound Effects & Dialogue: Since some of Mr. Samura's sound effects are integral parts of the artwork, the decision was made to leave those in their original Japanese. When it was crucial to the understanding of the panel that the sound effect be in English, however, Mr. Samura chose to redraw the panel. We hope readers will view the unretouched sound effects as essential portions of Mr. Samura's extraordinary artwork. In addition, Mr. Samura's treatment of dialogue is quite different from that featured in average samurai manga and is considered to be one of the things that has made *Blade* such a huge hit in Japan. Mr. Samura has mixed a variety of linguistic styles in this fantasy story, where some characters speak in the mannered style of old Japan, while others speak as if they were street-corner punks from a bad area of modern-day Tokyo. The anachronistic slang used by some of the characters in the English translation reflects the unusual mix of speech patterns from the original Japanese text.

Artwork by Simon Davis

NEXT MONTH:
Light and Shadow

Hunted by the surviving members of the *Shingyōtō-ryō* clan, Rin continues her flight towards Edo, traveling in a strange alliance with Anotsu, her sworn enemy. Will a mysterious ailment finally give Rin the chance to take him out? Or will she find herself fighting alongside him? In any case, fans of Rin's "Flight of the Golden Wasps" move will be pleased with another thrilling action sequence in this issue, done in Hiroaki Samura's kinetically masterful fashion. With Manji also hot on Rin's trail, several major players in this revenge epic begin to move closer to an inevitably bloody reunion!

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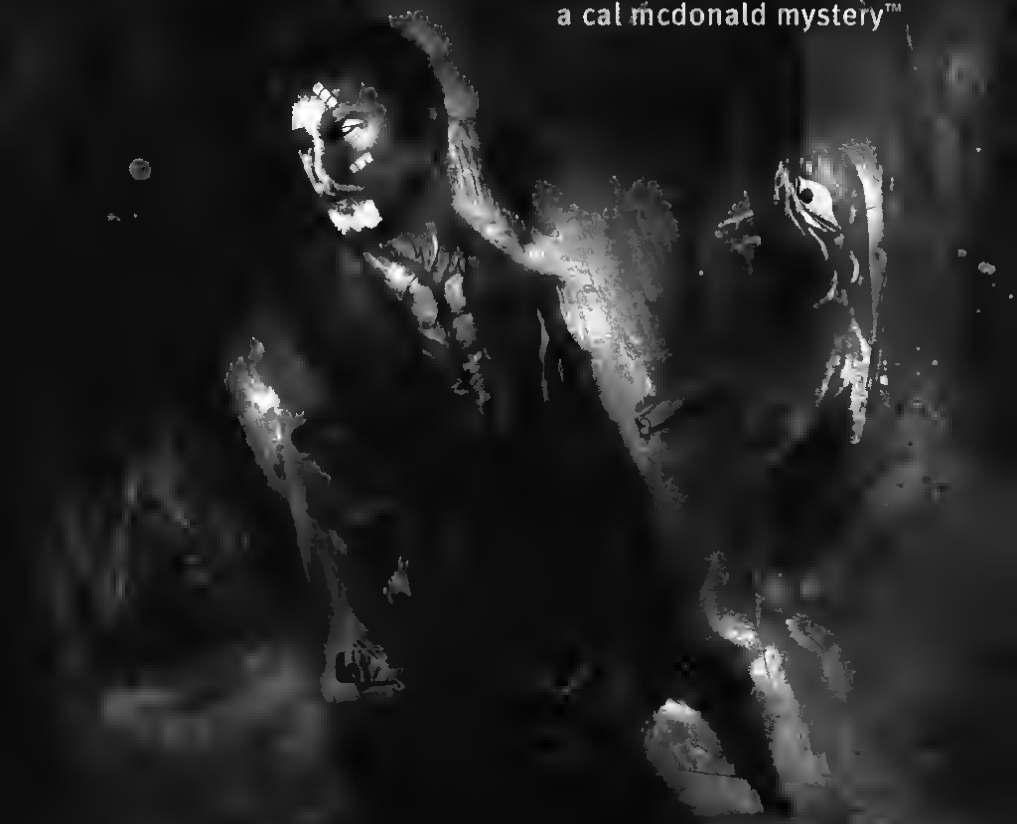

From the creators of the 2003 hit series *Criminal Macabre*
Standalone issue on sale January 2004

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HORSEPOWER

MIKE MIGNOLA'S

B.P.R.D.

I was in an airport bar on the way home from Texas when I first heard that absurd mouthful of syllables coming out of a TV. The blond barbie doll on *Access Hollywood* hyped, "They're not the X-Men, but there's a new group of bizarre superheroes: ***The Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defense***!"

This was a moment of true surreality.

In 1993, Mike Mignola concocted a team book inspired in part by Jack Kirby's ***Challengers of the Unknown***. At the time, the closest Mignola had come to writing a comic was co-plotting an issue of *Batman*, but within a couple years he'd be winning Eisners and Harveys as Best Writer/Artist. His team book had gained a more narrow focus due to the development of one character who overshadowed everything else the artist had created. Before long, Hellboy was one of the most talked about new characters; a favorite among comics professionals and fans.

The Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defense–I remember discussing the pros and cons of a 'for' or an 'of' in the name–maintained an important presence in the *Hellboy* comic, until 2001's *Conqueror Worm* series, when Hellboy quit the team. This was necessary for Mignola to take Hellboy, as a character and a book, in the new directions he had in mind, but it left the BPRD somewhat up for grabs; a miniseries and a quartet of one-shots have followed, by various writers and artists.

In the meantime, Mignola has been laying the groundwork for a new *BPRD* series–we call it "nearly ongoing," in that it will come out a lot more frequently than *Hellboy*, but still in novel-shaped arcs with short, one- or two-month breaks between. There was only one artist Mignola thought could realize the monsters and insanity that would be unleashed in these pages. Guy Davis of *Nevermen*, *Marquis*, and *Fantastic Four: Unstable Molecules* fame lends his outlandish vision–and monster designs unsurpassed in all the lands of comicdom–to Mignola's creation, in a story drawn from the very root of *Hellboy* mythology. Borne of an unstoppable fungus growing in a New Jersey lab, the frog creatures first seen in *Hellboy: Seed of Destruction* spread like a plague across the United States, their epicenter in the ghost town of Crab Point, Michigan. The attention that Mignola has long focused on Hellboy and his own bizarre origins will finally be turned on agents Liz Sherman, the enigmatic Abe Sapien, and the homunculus and the dome-head to boot.

While the *Hellboy* film promotion splashes *the* BPRD on billboards and TV screens and print ads, the most bizarre team book of all launches on comics shops across the country, with the world's strongest paranormal detectives taking center stage.

Scott Allie

Scott Allie

drawing on your nightmares

DARK HORSE COMICS

January 2004

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King Kirby

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